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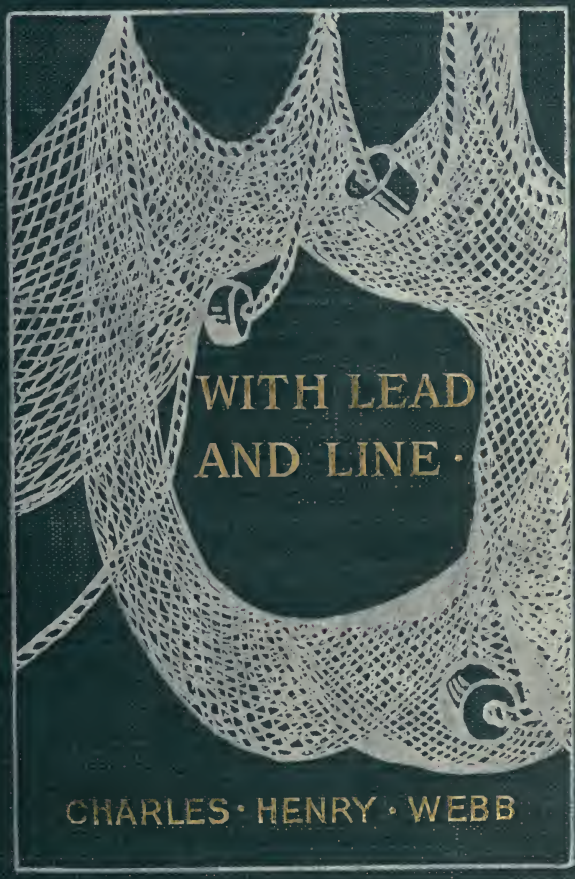

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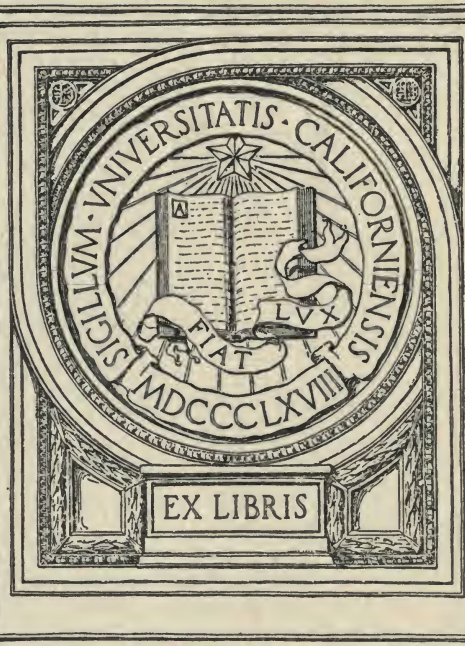

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ALONG VARYING SHORES
A BOOK OF POEMS BY
CHARLES HENRY WEBB
(JOHN PAUL)

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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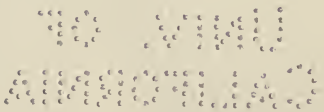

TO B. T. C.

Oh, friend, and sharer through long years
Of half my smiles, — of all my tears, —
Whose virtues I would here recall
If this one page could name them all:
The patience, never known to fail;
The liking for the twice-told tale;
The fondness for a sweet repose
That neither break nor ripple knows, —
Where hurry is not seen nor heard,
And worry is an unknown word,
Which moves you quiet nooks to seek
And stay in one — sometimes a week!
But in a heart, if once you dwell,
Fixed there as by a sorcerer's spell,
And with a restless, wayward friend
Enduring, constant to the end,
Tried friend — oft sorely tried — and true,
I dedicate this book to you.

C. H. W.

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OCCASIONAL AND SEMI-OCCASIONAL VERSES

With Lead and Line

DICTUM SAPIENTI

THAT 't is well to be off with the old love
Before one is on with the new
Has somehow passed into a proverb, —
But I never have found it true.

No love can be quite like the old love,
Whate'er may be said for the new —
And if you dismiss me, my darling,
You may come to this thinking, too.

Were the proverb not wiser if mended,
And the fickle and wavering told
To be sure they 're on with the new love
Before they are off with the old?

AN IDYL OF TWO MAYS

THE air was sweet with blooms of May,
Her head upon my bosom lay.
A year before we two had stood
Where now we sat, within the wood.
As now fell blossoms at our feet,
With woodsy smells the air was sweet;
All Nature's heart was glad astir,
And mine was full of love for her
Who stood beside me on this spot;
Perhaps she knew — I spoke it not.
The robin sung with rippling throat,
A bluebird trilled a love-born note;
A mocking-bird with saucy beak
Besought its mate — I could not speak;
Each flower that would a tendril twine
Laid bare its heart — I showed not mine,
But picked a bud that near us grew,
Its lips yet fragrant with the dew,
To lay it that it might caress
The little hand I dared not press.
Instead I held it in mine own,
And said, "Too soon this bud has blown."

Strange that a year should do so much.
Not now her hand I feared to touch.
The birds that so outbraved me then
Sang their old love-notes o'er again.
The flowers that once my speech outvied
Had long since wedded, withered, died.
But I — see what a year can do! —
Had found new voice and courage, too —
And yet no timorous hand I pressed —
I took the whole girl to my breast,
And said, "I love you, dearest dear,
I 've loved you for the longest year."
And that she might believe it more,
I said the same thing o'er and o'er
Until each tree and echoing rock
With faint "I love you's" seemed to mock.
That she might more the truth perceive
I kissed her lips, I do believe.
I kissed her eyes, their eyelids through —
Dear eyes, though shut, they saw and knew —
Until a magpie fled the glen,
Remarking on ill-mannered men;
And a dear robin near us said —
Blushing till all her breast was red:
"If those queer birds now both agree
To build, why, here 's a vacant tree."

Nothing there was of life but lent
Unto our love encouragement.
And I had thought to find reproof
From all beneath that arching roof!
But Nature, who these things commands,
Blessed with high-lifted holy hands,
And smiling on us seemed to say,
"My children, there's no other way."
And she whose dear and sacred head
Lay on my bosom, when I said,
"If this be bad, then dearest, know
I was as bad a year ago,"
Put up her lips — I bent to hear —
And whispered softly in my ear:
"If all this badness in your breast
A year ago you had confessed
I might have pardoned; now I see
How much, how long you 've cheated me —
But I absolve you, dear, by this" —
Ne'er sweeter cross did sinner kiss.

A VILLANELLE

(With a copy of Jean Passerat's
"J'ay perdu ma tourterelle; . . .
Je veux aller après elle.")

JEAN PASSERAT, thy tourterelle,
The dove that from thy bosom flew,
Does not with any mortal dwell;

And with it went the villanelle —
The art is, like thy dove, "perdu!"
Jean Passerat, thy tourterelle

Eludes the modern poet's spell;
To reproduce thy ring-dove's coo
Does not with any mortal dwell.

Once from the skies a clear note fell,
A purple pinion cleft the blue:
Jean Passerat, thy tourterelle

It was not, though it mocked thee well —
But thy sweet song to wake anew
Does not with any mortal dwell:

And since thyself went "après elle" —
Went after her the white gates through —
Jean Passerat, thy tourterelle
Does not with any mortal dwell!

GEORGINA

THE little lady shakes her head,
And vows that never will she wed:
But even while the tale she tells,
There comes a sound of wedding-bells.

O, you may trust the fickle vane
That only points to veer again,

But not the dainty little head
That shakes to say she will not wed.

IS THE VIOLET A NUN?

THE Violet may be a nun,
But for all her veil and vows,
I 've seen in — shall I say one ?
Rather more than the convent allows.

I 've seen — shall I say with surprise ? —
This novice of blossoms caressed,
And right under the abbess's eyes,
To a Bachelor's Buttons close pressed.

And though with a fine show of grace,
Looking now where a Sweet William stands,
She make feint to cover her face,
I am sure that she peeps through her hands.

Ay, pose though she may as a nun,
There are some that could speak if they would ;
But go back I will never, for one,
On the shy-eyed and sweet sisterhood.

TO ONE SIXTEEN

WHO could believe, my little queen,
So many years were thine — sixteen!
That sifting on thy head their gold
So many moons had o'er thee rolled!
But stranger still to me, a sage,
And more appalling than thine age,
Is that in all this waste of years —
So saidst thou, and with smiles, not tears —
Years that diplomas might have earned,
To love as yet thou hast not learned.
What, sixteen years! Were it a week!
But in less time have girls learned Greek;
And in less time have eyes less blue
Won hearts, yes, worlds — and lost them too.
In half the years that thou hast told
I 've somehow managed to grow old,
Too old — the figure 's one of speech —
Too old to love, but not to teach;
If learned thou hast not, I, as true,
Have not forgot what once I knew.
Let me then straight thy teacher be —
Since I can nothing learn of thee!

TO ONE WHO SAYS SHE IS "FIFTY, TOO"

TO plainly speak and call spades, spades,
I think thou fibbest, Maid of maids—
When I my fifty years tell true —
In saying thou art fifty-two!
Cloudless thy brow and free from care
As Morning's when the day bids fair;
Upon thy cheeks but dimples show,
Nor have thy lips yet lost the glow
Of ripening cherries, and thine eyes
Still shame the blue of summer skies.
What then though in thy Bible old
A date be on the birth-page told, —
In such a month, on such a morn,
In eighteen-something thou wert born,
More plain on Nature's every page
Is writ the secret of her age.
And yet if sunshine glad the earth,
Who cares to know when it had birth?
Why, Venus, whose caressing eyes
Look fondly down from velvet skies,
Was born so long ago — not men —

Only the gods up there know when.
The morning stars, on duty told,
Though late they watch seem never old —
And yet together they have sung
So long that even I seem young.
Is it then needful to confess,
Or even hint, what none would guess?
That *Record* at the good book's end
Was by no oldtime prophet penned.
If then its one unhallowed page —
Profane, to thus pervert an age —
It keep not safe and surely hid,
Thy Bible burn, like Captain Kidd;
Till in the very text I 'm told,
I 'll not believe that thou art old.

MILDRED ASKS FOR AN AUTOGRAPH

(IN HER "VAGROM VERSE")

EASIEST seemed it of all tasks —
"Just a couplet Mildred asks."
In that day, devoid of grace,
Ere I looked on Mildred's face,
Ere the maid of maids I knew,
Seemed it any rhyme would do.
Now my folly, sweet, I see —
Vagrom verse is not for thee:
Rather lyrics, golden, rare;
Jewelled verse that queens might wear.
Were I but some bard of old,
Bore I but his harp of gold,
Could I featly touch the strings,
Mine should be the gift of kings.
Since such offering may not be,
Wear this wreath I weave for thee —
Though no glitt'ring crown be seen,
Men shall know thee for a queen.

WITH A ROSEBUD

THIS fair rosebud, Elsie, see,
Gathered by my hand for thee —
While the morning yet was new,
And its leaves still wet with dew.
It may die — but if for thee,
Who would not the rosebud be?
Shall I tell thee to my thought
Whom its fresh young beauty brought —
Conscious that in turn to thee
It can bring no thought of me?
By this token know, young maid,
Rosebuds are not all that fade.
Wouldst thou quite believe, if told,
That I was not always old?
Yet the floweret prithee take;
Wear it for the giver's sake.
Though it breathe to thee in sooth,
But of beauty, now, and youth,
When it fades into the sear,
It may then suggest me, dear.

WITH A ROSE

LADY, lest they should betray,
On thy lips this rose I lay,

Not its petals to surprise
With a hue that theirs outvies,

Not to shame them to confess
Fragrance of the Rose is less —

Only with a rose to seal
Rosebud lips, lest they reveal —

Faint unfolding, in their sleep —
What a rose's heart should keep.

Eden since, no wizard knows
Spell that bindeth like a rose —

Flower of Love, the last to leave,
Bud that blossomed first for Eve.

With my rose for lock and key
None shall pick thy lips, pardie!

But to me if they unclose —
All is safe beneath the rose.

ELUDED

WHY dost thou come to me and but in dreams,
Dreams of the night and visions of the day?
As light, as life, thy presence to me seems,
And yet I do not bid thee come nor stay.
Is it that in the still and hush of night,
Thou hearest my heart call pleadingly for thee?
That in the brightness of the noonday light
Thou dost alone my shadowy beckoning see?
And rushing softly, swiftly, as from skies afar,
Fall'st on my breast, a throbbing, kindling star?
Yet when my arms, within a close embrace,
Thy form would fold, I clasp but empty space;
And from my slumber waking, with a moan,
I find myself more lonely than alone.
Oh, mocking presence, born of thinnest air,
No part of me, though with me everywhere,
Why always thus my waking sense betray?
Oh, come to me no more or rest with me alway.

WAS IT INDEED BUT A DREAM?

I DREAMED that you kissed me, dear —
Was it indeed but a dream?
To my heart you lay very near —
And can so much happiness seem?

In the hush of the night you came;
My hair was stirred by your breath,
And my blood would have leaped into flame
Had my sleep been the slumber of death.

And when you had kissed me, love,
A rose you laid on my mouth.
Did you think I could traitorous prove,
O one sweet flower of the South!

I thought that your lips still clung
As I drank in the rose's perfume;
And a golden censer was swung,
And a glory enfolded the room.

I cried, " O love, is it true
That my hair by your kisses is blown?
Oh, of women the one, is it you —
And am I indeed your own?"

Alas for a vision of bliss!
And alas for the rose that it fade!
But I say in my waking, If this
Be the stuff of which dreams are made,

Let slumber the vision renew,
Than the real give me rather what seems,
And, never awaking, with you
Let me live in a land of dreams.

TO LULU

(ON ONE OF *MY* BIRTHDAYS)

BIRTHDAY again!
But nothing I rue;
No age can have terror
That brings to me — you.

If winged went the year
None too swiftly it flew,
For 't was only its last
That revealed to me — you.

How many my years?
Ah, dear, *if* you knew;
But why count the ones
That were lived without — you!

Now Time turns him backward, —
Indeed this is true, —
I 'm just a year younger
Since I 've known — you!

HAB ICH GELIEBET?

(SHE QUESTIONS)

HAVE I loved? I have lived. And listen, dear,
To live is to love, I say;
I have loved and lived for many a year —
I live and I love to-day.

And some of my love to the living I give,
And some to but lifeless clay,
For some of my loves yet love and live,
And some have been borne away.

But hither or thither to me is one —
Once to love is to love for aye;
And I kneel to a love in the churchyard yon
As I kneel to thee, love, to-day.

Now the shadows of evening above me bend,
The sky in the west is gray;
But still I must love to the very end,
For I know no other way.

And though of fools, all others above,
There is none like an old, they say,
If it be folly to live and love,
Let me be a fool alway.

WHAT SHE SAID ABOUT IT

LYRICS to Inez and Jane,
Dolores and Ethel and May;
Señoritas distant as Spain,
And damsels just over the way!

It is not that I'm jealous, not that,
Of either Dolores or Jane,
Of some girl in an opposite flat,
Or in one of his castles in Spain.

But it is that salable prose
Put aside for this profitless strain,
I sit the day darning his hose —
And he sings of Dolores and Jane.

Though the winged-horse must caracole free —
With the pretty, while "spurning the plain,"
Should the team-work fall wholly on me
While he soars with Dolores and Jane?

I am neither Dolores nor Jane,
But to lighten a little my life
Might the Poet not spare me a strain —
Although I am only his wife!

A SHEAF OF INSCRIPTIONS WITH COPIES OF "VAGROM VERSE"

TO MISS V–O–A R–S–B–O

THESE vagrant rhymes of mine, I fear, may lead thee to suppose
My heart has, too, been but a tramp that here and thither goes —
A wandering bee, coquetting free, with every flower that grows,
Now with the nunlike Edelweiss that kneels amid the snows,
And now some gorgeous Passion-flower, that in the tropics blows.

But though my heart *has* been the tramp that here and thither goes —
An errant bee, coquetting free, with every flower that grows,
Now with the nunlike Edelweiss that kneels amid the snows,
And now some gorgeous Passion-flower that in the tropics blows —

Just listen near, and in thine ear a secret I 'll
disclose :
I 've had a wondrous change of heart, that no
one thinks or knows ;
And seeking now in Viola inviolate repose —
My heart would ever dwell with thee, O Lady
of the Rose !

TO MISS E–I–H M. T–OM–S

Songstress, we come, my little book and I ;
But not with thee in minstrelsy to vie :
Let us but lie and listen, rapt and mute,
To the melodious breathings of thy lute —
Lie near thy heart and listen : so, erelong,
We too may learn the secret of thy song.

TO MISS H–R–T M–NR–E

Two lovers come ;
Look ! lady, look !
One with a rose,
One with a book.

Let the rose rest
Where a rose may—

To thy heart prest
Just for a day.

But the book take —
Of me a part,
It and its song, dear,
Into thy heart.

TO MISS L. I. M–NR–E

(WITH A VELLUM COPY)

All unashamed,
Though with little of cover,
Here are my lyrics —
Where is the lover?

Are they not cunning,
Wrapped all in white —
Like nursery darlings
Fixed for the night?

Folding the vellum
To thy fair breast,
Giving my wanderers
Shelter and rest,

Would you much mind, dear,
Should you discover
That along with the lyrics,
There 's lurking the lover!

TO E–L–Z–B–H, MY WIFE

If but one line of all that 's here
Should linger in thy memory, dear,
Though all the rest should be forgot
And other lips should name me not,
What more than this could Fortune give —
In that one line with thee to live?

SAINTS AND MARTYRS

SAINTS an' martyrs?
S'pose there be.
Hain't seen many?
'Tween you an' me,
P'r'aps thar ain't many
Fer ter see!

But I 've hearn a boy
With grumblin' look
A-shoutin', "Ma!
I want my book!"
An' I 've seen a martyr
Sarch every nook.

An' a leetle gal
I 've known to cry,
With an ache in her head —
That was all in my eye —
An' a saint soothed her
With a lullaby.

An' I 've seen a man
  Without much har
Look for a thing
  That was n't thar —
Whar he had n't put it —
  An' swar an' swar.

Then I 've seen the martyr
  Find the book —
Nary a cross word,
  Nary a look, —
An' the boy at school
  The spellin' prize took.

An' the leetle gal
  Woke up from sleep,
To help the saint
  To dust an' sweep, —
An' at night 'fessed up
  With contrition deep.

Fer the feller, too,
  Without much har,
She found the thing
  (That lay just thar,

Whar he had put it),
An' a kiss to spar.

Now I that boy
Would 'a' spanked with his book;
The leetle gal
I 'd 'a' shook an' shook,
An' a feller without
E'er a har forsook.

Saints an' martyrs
P'r'aps ain't rife, —
The woods ain't full, —
But, bet yer life,
I know one —
An' that 's my wife!

LOVE

OVE is a day
With no thought of morrow.
Love is a joy
With no thought of sorrow.

Love is to give
With no thought of receiving.
Love is to trust —
Without quite believing.

SUSPENSE

O little a light,
Can it live?
Just a flicker in the night, —
Angels, give
It shield with your wings,
Lest a breath —
Your white robes' rustlings —
Should be death.

So little the spark,
So immense
The great world; and the dark
Is so dense,
I dare not to pray,
But, lips hushed with fear,
In my soul's depths I say,
"God is near."

A SONG OF THREE

H, the way was weary, the path was steep,
But, a woman, I won it, and stood by the deep —

Until out from the mists of a mystic sea
A babe on a roseleaf came sailing to me.

Its little hands clasped as though it prayed,
In my arms my first-born they tenderly laid.

Oh, the joy in my heart that over the sea
The daughter I held had been wafted to me!

But scarce had I turned my feet from the shore
When out in the offing there loomed once more

The roseleaf barque, and again a hail —
Loud of command, though an infant's wail —

Told land was made, that the voyage was done,
And there sprang to the shore a rollicking son.

Then with lifted heart and on bended knee
I thanked the good Pilot that over the sea —

That over the sea and safe from all harms —
Brought the babe that lay in my welcoming arms.

But the heart of me sank and my cheek turned pale,
When again the gleam of that roseleaf sail

In the distance shone; yet I stood by the shore,
And a welcome gave to the freight it bore —

A daughter again; and a dearer thing
There never a roseleaf barque did bring.

Ah, well may you know that not of the three
Would I yield one back to the mystic sea,

And I bless the Great Pilot, that through the dark
And the storm safe brought the roseleaf barque;

But counting my treasures, One, Two, Three,
I say that enough I have had of the sea;

And since by the shore I 've done my share,
Let babes now to others the rose-barque bear.

THAT POET OF THE FUTURE

I'VE been reading, Mr. Riley, in a recent magazine,
Of your Poet of the Future with the truly rural mien, —
Of the careless, simple fashion in which he 'll choose to come,
With the beauty of his bugle overbalancing the drum;
And by what his hands hold not, and by what he does not wear,
I rather think I 'd know him, if I met him anywhere:
But really, Mr. Riley, I do not clearly see
How you can at such a distance say that the Poet 's "he."

For it may be that this singer who shall our souls confess,
And come to us with bugles — will wear them on her dress;
That we shall find her shining with pearls upon her breast,

Or radiant in some cottage as she lulls her babes
to rest;
In the choir of the cathedral we may hear her
pure voice swell,
Or murmuring some sweet measure as she serves
us from the well;
For her hands may not be sunburned, although
her gloves be tan;
And your poet, Mr. Riley, may not be at all a man!

Oh, the Poet of the Future shall find welcome
and have room,
Whether with a ploughshare coming, or sweep-
ing with a broom;
But this "honest arm of labor" that you speak
of in your song,
Always to a "him" ascribing, — may it not to
"her" belong?
For some women's "palms" are sisters to the
"honest toiler's" too,
And they cannot always fold them when the
ploughman's toil is through;
And it may be that this Poet, on whose coming
we agree,
When really come and with us will be spoken
of as "she."

THE NEW WOMAN

WHEN the Lord softly came
And a rib prigged from Adam,
Giving Eden a dame
And the first man a madam,

All beauty had birth,
And most that was human
And gladdened the earth
Came with the new woman.

New joy filled the land,
Single blessedness doubled;
So the Lord stayed his hand,
And our ribs left untroubled.

But now with a moan
Man is asking, impassioned,
From what funny bone
Is this New Woman fashioned?

If not from a jaw,
It certainly seems so,

With physics and law
  Her eloquence streams so ;

With her rights and her tights —
  One dare not say breeches;
Her new living and lights,
  Her speeches and speeches :

Does the New Woman then,
  In her singular rabies,
Find nothing in men,
  Next to nothing in babies ?

Alas, and alack !
  Oh, Moses, and murther !
I 'd see the Old back,
  And the New Woman further !

See, sisters, I kneel,
  Though I don't often meddle,
And I pray, ease the wheel ;
  Oh, woman, back pedal !

GIL, THE TOREADOR

THE Queen sat in her balcony,
The Loveliest of Spain;
Beneath rode all the chivalry,
And roses fell like rain
To greet the gallant gentlemen
The gonfalon who bore:
A woman's favor fell for one, —
Gil, the Toreador.

Beneath the royal canopy,
To see the red bull slain,
They sat, like loyal lovers,
The King and Queen of Spain.
Came marshal, noble, knight and squire,
Chulo and picador:
Of all a woman saw but one, —
Gil, the Toreador.

The trumpets clanged, the sport was on,
The royal sport of Spain;
Maddened by shouts and thrust of lance
The bull now charged amain:

Down to their death went chulos then,
And many a matador:
One woman only knew there fell
Gil, the Toreador.

When through the streets of proud Madrid
Swept next the courtly train,
Sat not within her balcony
The Loveliest of Spain.
Long live the King and his fair Queen,
Still loyal thousands roar: —
None know what woman died when fell
Gil, the Toreador.

AT NAISHÁPÚR

COME forth, old Omar, with me wassail keep;
Night, as thou knowest, was not meant for sleep.
That thou art with Jamshyd and Kaikobád
They lie who say; thou hast but drunken deep.

The Grape invites, the Tavern Door swings wide.
Were 't a Muezzin from the Tower that cried
I had not waked thee; but when that Door gapes,
One tarries not until he stands inside.

Arouse then, Omar; 't is no Porter bawls;
If strange the voice, bethink thee Hátim calls;
The Tame Ass slumbers now with folded ears,
And from Night's bosom lo the jewel falls.

While Wine has color and the Rose is red,
Shall we not seize them? As thyself hath said —

Or something like — in thine own Rubáiyát,
Live while we may, since one 's a long time dead.

In that Inverted Bowl they call the sky,
Thou could'st not be content, — no more than I,
Who am like thee an Uninverted Pot,
As wide of throat and to the full as dry.

Yet thou than I being somewhat longer baked,
Thy thirst of late perhaps less often slaked,
Methinks thou shouldst uplift a grateful lip
With thanks to him who hath thee kindly waked.

And knowing now — if so thou knowest aught —
More than Kaikhosrú knew or Súfis taught,
Were it not neighborly the truth of it
To tell to one who knows — or guesses — naught ?

To tell him, sooth, if One who shape allots
Unto each pipkin, while He moulds them plots
Destruction for his failures, and by Fire, —
Pleaseth the Potter then to pot his Pots ?

Still stamps the Wild Ass, and the Tame One prates ;
But thou art silent, though I come with cates,
Thinking thy long, long Ramazán to break
With Figs and Facts, Old Wine, and Latest Dates.

So, sleeping Omar, lo, the Loving Cup
I hither brought, and thought with thee to sup,
I pour above thee now at Naishápúr ;
It may refresh, though scant to fill thee up.

AN AGE OF INK

F all the ages ever known,
Of Brass or Bronze, of Brick or Stone,
The blackest and the worst, I think,
Is this pestiferous Age of Ink.
In volume vast the torrent pours,
Its volumes blocking all outdoors ;
And fed and fattened as it flows
With verses scanned and potted prose,
Though all would dam it, — and some do, —
The Deluge still is *après nous.*
Lured to the brink women and men
A moment pause — then dip a pen.
If, deep of keel and broad of beam,
Some mighty monster stem the stream,
Green paths and pastures boys forsake
To founder in the Kipling wake.
And girls ! — not gunners nor marines
So swift could flood the magazines.
Through many-storied novelettes
Their hero strides, in pantalets,

Haughty of mien, pallid of brow,
And would be bad — if he knew how.
Pity they 've not a special pen, —
That women must line up with men ;
In the same field they harrow so, —
She with her Rake, he with his Hoe ;
And wonder wakes with every screed,
If all are writing, who 's to read ?
"And *you !*" I hear some scribbler say.
Oh yes, I 'm there, — exhibit A.
But one must live ; small is my store ;
A wolf stands darkening the door :
He must be driven to his den,
And so I prod him with my pen.
When children for new grammars cry,
Can parents stand unheeding by ?
So my pluperfect babes I kiss,
Then dash off verses much like this.
If any are my special pride,
Excursion tickets I provide, —
That if none else the moral see,
At least it will come home to me.
But no envelope as its crest
Bears ever the "return request,"
That in detail superfluous gives
The street whereon the Poet lives.

The door outside of which, elate,
His Muse a minuet treads in state,
With broidered skirt and lifted head —
Inside a cake walk does for bread.
Though few may know where Sappho sung
Or Ossian once his wild harp hung,
And Homer's birthplace be in doubt,
My sins and songs soon find me out,
And with a promptness none would guess
Turn up, and at the right address.
If this do not, I 'll say and think
There 's one redeeming thing in Ink.

ISHMAEL

UT on the Desert thrust,
In the dusk of the Desert to die!
My mother had served his lust;
And the bond-woman's child was I!

Dark were the eyes of my Mother,
Brown was her bosom and bare;
To the weazened dugs of the other
I laughed when they laid an heir.

For this should my mother be driven
From the tent with his child by her side?
He would ask the will of Heaven —
And the voice of Sara replied.

The Patriarch knelt him apart,
Under the tamarisk's shade.
God! it was in my heart
To spear him as he prayed.

Could I who bent but the bow,
As ready have bent the knee,
I 'd have kneeled more long and low,
Crying, Vengeance, O Hagar, for thee!

But a curse is swift as a prayer,
Sped by one who cannot pray;
My seed breathe the free desert air —
His children are bond to-day.

IN THE TEMPLE

THY garments bedraggled and riven,
Thy feet all bleeding and bare,
Have men cast thee out unforgiven, —
And does not the good God care?

Does one of whom it is written
That without Him, who careth for all,
Not a sparrow shall fall, though smitten,
Have no care for a woman's fall?

In the full light of day, unconcealèd,
The shame of thy steps all might see —
Were the walk of some saints so revealèd
Perhaps we would canonize thee.

Though driven by stormy obsessions
Thy sins were as scarlet, I know,
In the night of my darker transgressions
Thou standest as white as snow;

And the stone cast at thee, O woman,
When the elders shall find, and assign
To that duty, one sinless — and human —
Thy bosom shall bruise but through mine.

Than man's one mercy is vaster;
Though no Rabbi may roll back the years,
Let us sit at the feet of the Master,
And thine I will wash with my tears.

If still thou must wander, unshriven,
Thy hand clasped in my hand shall dwell —
I will lift thee with me up to Heaven,
Or thou shalt drag me down to hell.

AT THE TRAPS

OF doves in the cote
Twenty thousand or more,
A brute at the trap,
And a brute at the score;

A measure of powder,
A handful of shot,
And "use of both barrels," —
Is 't murder or not?

Two reeking tubes roar,
And flame and smoke tell
For an innocent birdling
The tortures of Hell.

On crippled wing drooping,
Its beak shot away, —
A crime, — and at midnight?
No, done in full day.

And this in a land
That Humanity peoples —

Where Heaven is hid
  In a tangle of steeples!

And this is the Dove
  Whose progenitrix flew
Over world-whelming waters
  The earth to renew, —

Whose white-plumaged mates
  Through the ether above
Once the golden car drew
  Of the fair Queen of Love!

They were heathens who wrote —
  Cruel pagans — who told
That mythic, sweet story
  Of Venus of old.

But sooner with them
  I 'd Eternity share
Than with Christians in reek
  Of powder and prayer.

And if pity there be,
  And the heavens above

Smile not on the slaughter
Of Ararat's dove,

With your lightnings protest,
And, to even the score,
Pigeon-shooters "provide" —
Twenty thousand or more, —

That fowl of the air
That cripple and kill,
In their turn have "sport,"
And batten at will.

If the raven refuse
(And the vulture perhap),
Still keep brutes at the score,
And let brutes pull the trap!

O THE PITY OF IT!

(FEBRUARY 27, 1859)

BRIDLE thy censure,
Tether thy tongue;
Pity the fair vine
Blighted so young!
Why not the tomb?
Wreck of a life;
Think of her doom —
Widow yet wife!

Tears like sad rivers
Roll through all time;
One his heart's torrent
Poured for its crime.
Billows of sod
Swell o'er his breast;
Pleading with God —
There let him rest.

Still to another
Life is as death;

Home and its idol
Gone with a breath!
Blood on his hands,
Stain on his bed:
Pity them all —
Living and dead.

Thou whose life current
Calm flows and quiet,
Whose love — or whose passion —
Never ran riot,
Judge not too harshly;
Few fall by design;
Pray for the erring —
Their fate may be thine!

Bridle thy censure,
Tether thy tongue;
Charity's blessings
Ever are young.
He knows the temptation
Who measures the sin;
May his mantling mercy
Shield all our kin.

A REQUIEM FOR THE DEAD LEADER

(DECEMBER 2, 1859)

SLEEP, sleep, John Brown!
December's leaves are sere,
And a brave old oak has fallen
And perished with the year;
You may journey to the sunset,
And from sunset to the sea,
But you 'll find not in the forest
So stout, so brave a tree.

No shame, John Brown,
Though by the rope one die;
Up yonder 'mong the stars
They ask not how, but Why.
Others have died for kings,
But thou diedst for the slave;
And the blessed fruit of Liberty
Shall ripen on thy grave.

Rest, rest, John Brown;
All of thy work is done;

The darkest hour of night
  Heralds the rising sun.
Alas for those that cowered
  Before thy living breath;
Like Samson slain thou hast
  A tenfold might in death.

Rest thee, John Brown,
  O heart of noblest stuff!
"He thought and dared to do"
  Is epitaph enough.
A laurel wreath is thine;
  That laurel and a crown
Thy foes pressed on thy brow:
  Sleep on, John Brown!

TWO FRIENDS

I

TWO friends I had, whom in my heart I bore,
And one, the dearer — him I wounded sore, —
Not wholly with intent to do him wrong;
But for all that the shaft went straight and strong.
Contrite I cried, when once that it had sped,
"Forgive, O friend, forgive, or strike me dead!"
No word spoke he, but went his silent way,
And soon between us a world's wideness lay.
The shifting seas reveal no wanderer's track;
Years rolled their round, and brought an exile back.
To me? Ah, no! I knew, when then we met,
This friend forgave — but he could not forget.

II

Much to the other giving from my store,
With but the one regret it was not more, —

Not the poor dole that affluence rudely flings ;
From my scant store it was the gift of kings, —
Too soon it came that with a change of lot,
And mended fortunes, my friend knew me not.
First a cold nod ; then the inquiring bow
That says : We 've met, but when, and where,
and how ?
Until I wondered, were this really he
Who but as yesterday had good from me ;
Of ill the memory sure would longer live —
This friend forgot ; but he could not forgive.

MORAL

Heaven in its bounty friends unto me sent ;
From some I borrowed and to others lent.
Now this I say : If thou wouldst keep a friend,
Of him then borrow — wouldst thou lose him,
lend.

JOE JEFFERSON, OUR JOE

OE Jefferson, our Joe Jeff,
When first we knew your form
You traveled round the country,
And took the barns by storm.
It 's hearts that now you hold, Jeff—
You took them long ago;
God's blessings on your kindly phiz,
Joe Jefferson, our Joe.

Joe Jefferson, our own Joe,
We 've followed you around,
And though a trifle old now
We yet in front are found.
And still beyond this stage, Jeff,
We 'll follow where you go,
And greet you when the curtain 's raised, —
Joe Jefferson, our Joe!

TO E. C. S.

(ON FINDING THE BARNUM SHOW BEFORE HIS DOOR)

MY Edmund, lately listening to the tone
Of thy clear harp, — the while I picked mine own, —
Much have I marveled by what mighty sign
Thy conquering numbers so prevailed o'er mine.
But seeing now, in fond familiar calls,
This blazon new of zoöphoric walls
Before the generous, ready-opening door
To numbers known — its own being 44 —
All in that vision is revealed to me, —
How much thou owest to thy *vis-à-vis*.
Ere knew I that the Greatest Show on Earth
As sponsor stood at thine each stanza's birth,
That these gay posters plenteously spread
Were but the curtains of thy Muse's bed,
Praise gave I only to the tuneful Nine,
Unsentient quite of other Pens than thine.

But much it is that thus in soft retreat —
The cushioned ambush of a window-seat, —

Reflected halos wreathed about thy head
Of chromoed gymnasts, green, and blue, and red, —
Thy *rus in urbe* no contracted field,
But all of Afric's burning heart revealed, —
Far from the madding crowd, compelled to pay,
Thou calm mayst sit and free the Show survey;
See the lithe leopard old-time seers confound,
And change his spots at every agile bound;
The zebra bear, and with a martyr's zeal,
The stripes that only those about him feel;
The tall giraffe a tapering neck display,
Whereon long woe might well be wept away;
While if for sympathy the Giant cries,
Does the Fat Woman not respond with size?

Here under thine own vine and figtree's shade,
And the sweet influence of the Bearded Maid,
Nature anigh — not rocks, nor streams, nor dells,
But herds, heard often, and wild woodsy smells
(But a bare pole's length from the canvas where
The sleek seal scuds before the Polar bear), —
Here thou mayst sit and thy light zithern play,
The ostrich rival with thine easier lay;
Soft sonnets warble to the timid deer,
Or bolder ballads to the buck-a-near.

Tiring of concourse that thy pace confines,
Of quadrupeds — and quadrupedal lines, —
In longer stride thy Pegasus let lope, —
In strong Pentameter, — approved of Pope, —
That all who visit the Great Show may see
Thou 'rt not outfooted by thy *vis-à-vis*,
And grant, though other airs pervade the street,
Thine own, O Singer, all are strangely sweet!

Indeed, when I reflect on all thou hast,
And with thine own my lowlier lot contrast, —
No circus near, no beast about my door,
Save the one wolf that sits there evermore, —
I ask why Fate should thus deny to me
The beasts and blessings she bestows on thee.

In mood more generous it is joy to know
Thou hast within thee — something — passing show;
Without, the rarest raree-show e'er shown, —
For thy rare Muse the one Museum known.
If still with greed I view thy *vis-à-vis*
One further thought bids all such baseness flee:

When Night comes on and the dark shades descend
On man and beast — and queer things without end;
Their Simian pure, when shrill chimpanzees speak —
A tongue once ours that now to us is Greek, —
And Jumbo answers from his cotton shroud
Back to the joyous apes that call to him aloud;
When wild cats try their subtler quaverings
And tame ones strain unfashioned fiddle-strings;
And thou from bed dost with a bootjack crawl
To hurl it at the blank — blanked caterwaul,
With sharp, swift speech that cleaves the midnight air
Curt as a curse but heartfelt as a prayer —
Speech all thine own, though neighbors think they hear
English as spoke by thy old "Buccaneer;"
Then, O my Edmund! then I envy thee
Thy verse, thy *vis* — but not *thy vis-à-vis!*

TO THE GUEST OF THE EVENING

(E. C. S. AT THE AUTHORS' CLUB RECEPTION, DECEMBER 6, 1900)

DEAR Edmund, when I count the years
That over us have rolled,
It seems to me I must be young,
And only thou art old.
For, yet a private in the ranks,
At best I close the rear,
Whilst thou dost ride in front bestarred, —
A mounted Brigadier.

So with our speech: while thine ran free
As water laced with wine,
Mine showed a slight impediment;
None ever found in thine.
It seemed that thou on horseback wert,
That by thy side I walked;
Though when the monologue was done
I thought that I had talked.

Ah, dearest friend and poet, best
Of all who woo the muse,

I am not envious, but I 'd like
To stand there in thy shoes.
While all this mighty guild press round
With words of love and praise,
None baying at thy heels, but all
Enwreathing thee with bays.

And well they may, for hast thou not
Been generous to them,
To each extending the glad hand
And not thy garments' hem ?
To thee they twang their rusty harps,
Old men, and wonder why
Thou stretchest too the helping hand
To youngsters such as I.

I 'll tell them why the helping hand,
And why the words of cheer,
Even to those who cannot write ;
Thou canst not help it, dear.
'T is just as Dr. Watts remarks,
Explainin' of the Zoo,
Why lions and tigers bark and bite :
It is thy nature to, —

Thy nature to be kind to all,
Women as well as men ;
To see a Browning in a bore,
A pullet in a hen.
But blessings on thy frosty pow —
Whatever pow may be, —
And, if this Authors' Club stood wine,
I 'd drain a cup to thee.

Yet if one have a catboat, dear,
Instead of a balloon,
Without some friendly slant of wind
One cannot make the moon.
So, while all other brows and ears
With laurel thou dost twine,
Although they be less prominent,
Oh, please remember mine.

And I will drink — when I get where
There 's something fit to drink,
Instead of stuff as thin as though
Each author brought his ink —
A cup to him who from his heart
Pours Poesy's choicest wine,
And as a critic never wrote —
Or thought — one unkind line.

TO ANOTHER GUEST OF ANOTHER EVENING

(F. R. S. AT THE AUTHORS', JAN. 31ST, 1901)

WHO makes this bee-line from the Valley,
Forsaking his Rudderless Grange,
And steers a straight course for the Authors',
Engaging our hearts at close range?

As shy as the fawn whom you startle,
And modest way down to the ground;
But brave as the stag if you rouse him,
And clean as the tooth of a hound.

Who is he, I ask you, this ranger,
Who plays such queer pranks with a Horn,
And seems to have bees in his bonnet?
By my faith, 't is the Bee Man of Orn!

And with him strange people, not strangers,
Are out — and you 'd say out for larks;
With a broom Mrs. Aleshine is rowing —
Mrs. Lecks wears black stockings, for sharks.

Some signal or other is flying
From the wreck of the good Thomas Hyke;
But the last of these curious launchings
Speeds hopelessly by on a Bike.

Still breathless we watch the arena
Where a wedding march waits, or a dirge,
For a youth to unfasten the portal —
Will a Lady or Tiger emerge?

But of all of the Wizard's creations,
Though I ramble and roam with the rest,
Let me live with Old Pipes and the Dryad,
The dearest and sweetest and best.

O wonderful weaver of fancies,
O wonderful teller of tales, —
A King in the Kingdom of Laughter,
And a Prince, but never of Wails!

One cannot always be clever;
The brightest at times may be dull;
But here we've a wag with a record —
For all that's not clever is Null.

And long may he wave and ne'er waver
In his travail for Woman and Man;
And live — if he cannot forever,
At least just as long as he can.

WATCH NIGHT AT THE AUTHORS'

H, watchers of the Authors' Club,
Why do ye keep Watch Night, —
Unless because to keep things close
Ye must of needs be tight?

I 've seen the New Year come — ah, no!
We'll number not the times;
And just as oft the Old Year go,
Rung out by Christmas chimes.

I 've sat in these sepulchral rooms
Our canny Scotchman gave,
And listened to the funny things
Till I felt very grave.

I 've seen young members pull on pipes
That jut beyond their ears;
I 've heard old talkers perorate,
And thanks were blent with tears.

I 've seen a liberal member bow,
Or, rather, crook his knee,

To ask why this is always thus —
And love and beer not free.

I miss the blue-eyed bard who scours
Some vex'd Bermoothes' beach
For pebbles — like Demosthenes' —
To pave and smooth his speech.

Another poet, once divine,
At Princeton bides and teaches;
But there, or here — or pulpited —
Do any say he preaches!

We 've our own Abbey — here I 'll pause;
Experience proclaims
That in an Authors' Parliament
One should n't mention names;

For with one great name mentioned, and
A greater one left out,
Two men are sure to be aggrieved —
And which the worse, I doubt.

But hither, minions, bear a cup,
I know not what it be;

But since it has a Scotchy smell,
We 'll call it "barley bree."

And this good cup I empty now,
And will refill the same,
To all who authors really are
And all who have the name.

To those who gather up the fruit,
To those who shake the tree,
To those who think that art is Art,
And those who disagree.

So, stand and hold your glasses high,
And turn the lights down low,
And chant to speed the going ghost
The dirge of Long Ago.

And if a twelvemonth hence we meet
To swaddle the New Year
And shroud the dying one, God grant —
God send we all be here!

NANTUCKET WAIFS

MY OLD SKIPPERS

DEAR are Nantucket's sands to me,
Its wrinkled sands, and brown ;
Dear are the open sea-sprayed moors
That skirt the dear old town.
But dearer far its skippers are,
The skippers whom I sing ;
And to me more than moor or shore
The moorings where they cling.

When rounding Brant Point on the right,
You come upon the town,
My skippers, too, loom into view,
Sun-dried, and seamed, and brown.
You see them sitting on the wharf,
Where they last summer sat —
The good old wharf that berths alike
The sea-dog and his cat.

Oft in that cat, with sheet hauled flat,
'Adzooks! I've sailed the rips,
While Obed rolled his quid and told
What he had seen in ships :

Of flying fish that come at night
To roost them in the tops;
Of Pharaoh's wheels that foul the flukes
When down an anchor drops.

Though Red the sea where this should be,
The Black instead he'd name;
And if you doubted of a wheel,
Up the whole chariot came!
He told us, too, how cannibals
Would waver and retreat,
If he but showed his pictured arm —
And their tattoo was beat!

The wind the while was dead ahead,
But right into its eye
Good Obed talked — I mean he steered —
As straight as he could lie.
All vain to praise the paths of truth
And point the happy goal
To him whose heaven 'Sconset was,
And Sheol but a shoal.

Becalmed, with reminiscent breath
They filled their threadbare sails,

And on the wharf of afternoons
Would speak of gales and whales —
How on some ground just off Japan
They grappled with typhoons,
Or in the life of great sperm-whales
Drove deep their red harpoons.

Ah, me! the loitering winters come,
The swift-winged summers go;
One season came with joy and guests —
But found not Captain Joe!
And now with apprehensive glance
I question wharf and wave;
A boat swings idly to its chain —
But where is Captain Dave?

Is it that in yon blue above
These missing seamen sail?
Steering great Argo through the skies,
Strike they the starry Whale?
For me it were no sorry fate,
Free from all moil below,
To cruise in some celestial craft
With Captains Dave and Joe!

The harbor light burns clear and bright,
  But past its ruddy glare
Do sails still glide to seas outside
  And no wave tell us where?
Still as of yore stretch moor and shore,
  And still I sail the rips;
But where are they, these skippers gray,
  Who sailed not hence in ships?

SID FISHER

IF you know Nantucket, the cliffs look down
On an arm from the shore stretched bare and brown,
The gray mists cleaving, the green waters through,
A clutch as it were at the skirts of Coatue;
Of rubble and rock as ragged a reef,
You 'd say, as ever brought ship to grief;
But this is the jetty, thrust channelward far
To cut down the sands of the harbor bar,
That the ship hard driven by wave and wind —
Shoals on both sides and the devil behind —
In her storm and stress may a haven find.

But here 's sailor luck: at sea as on shore
Arms that should shield are a peril the more,
When the fishing-fleet is late outside,
A gale blowing in with an out-running tide,
And the little boats, with their jibs tied down
And the last reef in, run back for the town.

God help them then, and their souls befriend,
If there show no light on the jetty's end!

Sid Fisher's the duty to keep that light
On the end of the jetty burning and bright;
Whatever the weather, blow high or blow low, —
Whether it rain or whether it snow,
Whether the sky show black as ink
Or a color caught from the sea-shell's pink,
Whether from northward come the blast
Or a stiff sou'wester buckle the mast, —
In dory or cat-boat out he must go,
And a light on the end of the jetty show.

Not much of a trick that may seem to you
Who come to us only when skies are blue,
And waves that fleck the face of the bay
For all of fierceness might be lambs at play;
But different it seems if you come in ships
When these waves are wolves with foam on their lips
And a snarl for their prey as they leap in air,
While the rocks that wait their white teeth bare.
Well may you shudder when rocks so smile —
I know, for I've lived on the lonely isle.

Once late in the fall came a terrible night, —
The sky was black and the sea was white;
The fishing fleet had been out all day
With their nets and trawls on the lower bay;
Though little of wind, we knew by the ruck
Of smoke-colored clouds around Tuckernuck,
By the whimper of gull and scream of curlew
As they wheeled and away for Muskeget flew,
By the sky flattened now like an adder's crest,
And the flashing of forked tongues in the north-
west,
That a pot full old Davy had put on to brew,
And soon it would simmer there, back of Coatue.

Night came, and the tempest, with drive and din,
Till the bravest well wished the boats were in, —
And more than wished when there came a shout
That the light on the end of the jetty was out!
It was then Sid Fisher said this thing to me:
"Ne'er a dory could land in that red-hot sea;
And my cat-boat out in that crunchin' swell
Would n't live no longer 'n a cat in hell!
But they 'd take it unkind, the boys, belike,
If their boats bound in on the jetty 'd strike.
'T ain't just what you 'd call a promisin' night;
But I guess I 'll skin out an' fix my light."

"It ain't no sort o' use," said old skipper Snow ;
But he said, said Sid Fisher, "I 'm a-goin'. to go ! "
He tightened no belt, for no belt he wore ;
He cast no last look as he left the shore
(And mostly you 'll find these belts and looks
Are frequentest tightened and cast in books) ;
But he took off his boots — a practical thing —
That his feet to the rocks might like limpets cling,
And out in the night and the storm he crept
To the jetty's end where the light was kept.

God ! it was something to see him go
Out on that reef of fear and woe !
However he did it I do not know !

The rocks all green with a slippery moss
Gave little of foothold by which to cross,
And with jagged points and barnacle shells
Cut wounds that were all of them crimson wells ;
But he climbed and bled through that hell of hells, —
Through lurid billows that high and higher
Swung torches of phosphorescent fire,

Through smother of spray and fret of spume
That flew like waste from a weaver's loom, —
Until lost in the night; and we saw no more,
Though all waited and watched upon the shore,
Till a red light showed on the jetty's end,
And the boats came bowling into the bend.

For he got there — and back; just how I can't
say;
But all out that night were alive next day;
For the matter of that, most are living yet,
Still busy with dredge, with trawl, and net —
Thanks to heaven — and something to Sid,
Who showed them a light when the stars were
hid.
"Only duty well done!" But can any do more,
Whether Bishop of York or stevedore?
That 's all I 've to say about Sid Fisher;
But, hero or not, I 'm his friend and well-wisher.

POLLY COFFIN

SEVENTEEN hundred and seventy-five —
Few of that year are now alive —
And save for the sob and throb of the tide,
The sea lay still on the South Shore side;
But with night there fell on land and main
A muffle of fog and drizzle of rain.

There had long been talk of a British barque
Hovering near, with letters of marque;
Carronades looking from low, black sides —
Old-fashioned cannon, mounted on slides —
Six it was said she carried, no less;
And a crew that was full of wickedness,
Picked and chosen for murderous work —
British of birth, but by training Turk.
Under short canvas, on and off shore,
It was said she had stood for a week or more,
Waiting for fog and a still night, — then
On the South Shore beach to land her men;
And the way was short to the little town,
Where Quakers in drab and fishermen brown

Trafficked and fished, uncaring a pin
Which of the Georges fail or win,
So Quaker and seaman saved each his skin.
On the South Shore meadows, to roam and browse,
Zerubabel Coffin kept his cows ;
And it fell by chance, this very day,
That one of the herd had gone astray,
And Polly, his daughter, far and near,
From Chappamaquiddy to Nobadeer,
Had strenuous sought till set of sun,
But found never a hair of that heifer dun.
Finally casting an eye to sea —
The very last place where a cow could be —
Nothing she saw of what she sought,
But a glimpse instead just one moment caught
Of a topsail lifting, white as snow,
Above the fog that hid all below.
A square-rigged vessel and close in shore :
Polly was versed in nautical lore ;
Whatever it meant, she knew, alack,
That she saw the sail of no fishing-smack.
All plain to her as an open book,
She waited not for a second look,
But with tucked-up petticoats fled amain,
Through drip of fog and drizzle of rain,

With splash of stockings and soak of shoes,
To the little town to carry the news.
The folk of the town were just turning in,
But instead turned out when they heard the din
Of Polly speeding from door to door
With, "British-a-landing on the South Shore!"
The Quaker caught up his broad-brimmed hat —
A man of peace, but what of that!
The sailor got into his oilskin suit,
The fisherman into one fishing boot;
He that had one primed his brown-bess;
Few were that lucky, but nevertheless
Every man had a good harpoon,
And he that would linger were poltroon;
It was all to the beach whatever the rig,
And the Dominie went without his wig.
Ambushed well behind drifts of sand
Commanding the beach where the foe must land,
Hardly had each the comfort possessed
Of knowing no bullet could reach his breast,
When Captain Zerubabel whispered, "Avast,
There's oars a-pullin', they're comin' fast;"
And scarce could the word be passed to each,
Ere a boat's keel grated upon the beach.

All dark as a pocket; the fog hung low;
Naught could be seen of the landing foe;
But you *felt* them near, and caught the clank
Of musket and sword, as they fell into rank.
It might be awkward if they got nigher,
And Captain Zerubabel sung out, "Fire!"
Odd was the burst from behind the dunes,
The air was thick with flying harpoons;
Zerubabel, shouting, "Lay 'em aboard!"
Bared the blubber-knife, borne as a sword;
Polly, outlying herdsmen to rouse,
Blew on the horn that called the cows;
There was smoke of powder and whistle of lead;
No one was hurt, but the British fled.
And when next morning the sun rose clear,
Nothing was seen off Nobadeer, —
Nothing of British, nothing of barque,
Nothing that read like letters of marque.
Some of that sort that always find fault
Doubted, indeed, of the whole assault;
Said that what Polly took for a sail
Was nothin', if not the spout of a whale;
As for boats an' Britishers on the beach —
When it came to that it beggared speech;

Nor would some of the skeptics even allow
So much as the presence of Polly's lost cow!
"If it had n't been nuthin'," some of them said,
"They 'd sartin hit somthin' with so much lead."
But the bulk believed, and thought gratitude due
To Captain Zerubabel and his crew;
And at special town-meetin', called next day,
To all who had parcel or part in the fray,
They voted thanks — and a pair of new shoes
To Polly Coffin who brought the news.

FOR THE RATHER YOUNG
AND VERY OLD

A WORD FOR THE OLD FOURTHS

ARE these Fourths like the old
Fourths —
The Fourths when we were
boys?
Do drums make as much music,
And powder as much noise?
If rightly I remember,
We were a merrier crowd;
Then drums and hearts beat higher,
And bands played twice as loud.

Tar-barrels we made ready
Before the end of June;
The almanac consulted
To see about the moon;
And when we lit that bonfire
Whole skies were crimsoned o'er.
Then boys, to be up early,
Stayed up the night before.

If father lent the musket
Once carried by his sire —

A tried and trusty weapon
That none but he dared fire —
After some slight contention
Which one should fire the first,
We pulled the trigger gently,
Lest gran'pa's gun should burst.

All knew there 'd come the circus,
For, many days before,
There stopped a yellow wagon
At the one tavern's door;
And straight with bright-hued posters
That tavern's front was filled,
Till barns, wood-piles, and fences
Seemed rainbows circus-billed.

Without his host he reckoned
Who thought to see that show
And not disburse a "quarter,"
As through the town they 'd go;
For all the things worth seeing
Went covered through the street —
The elephant in sackcloth,
The camel in a sheet.

And then came "General Muster," —
That was a martial scene;
And lemonade and soda
Were sold upon the green.
Equipped with queer old muskets —
Flint-locks that kicked like fun! —
The soldier proved his courage
Who stood behind his gun.

And then one stately figure
On horseback rode and bowed,
An officer and — Father!
Ah, me! but I was proud!
Still see I that dear chieftain,
"Fall in!" I hear him shout,
Though he who led that train-band
Has long been mustered out.

But I long for that Fourth olden,
Its merriment and noise,
When men trained one the other,
And women trained the boys;
When red seemed every sunset,
When blue seemed every sky;
When life seemed white and spotless,
And the Fourth held all July!

"GRAN'THER'S GUN"

LEXINGTON, 1840

MIND me well when I was young
Upon the wall a musket hung,
Old, useless, clumsy to the sight;
But still we scoured and kept it bright.
The neighbors all knew "Gran'ther's Gun;"
He carried it at Lexington.

The dear old man was very old,
His years himself scarce could have told;
Forgot all else about the war, —
Forgot e'en that he bore a scar;
To all we asked he had but one
Reply, "I fought at Lexington."

"Gran'ther," we said, "you 're very old,
Ninety years have o'er you rolled;
When you were young some things were new,
The town, and people in it, too:
What had you in those days for fun?"
He said, "We fought at Lexington!"

"Gran'ther," we said, "some persons say
That when one's locks get thin and gray,
One wishes, though the wish be vain,
His life he could live o'er again:
What would you do that you have done?"
He said, "I 'd fight at Lexington!"

One morn we knew the end was near;
A distant drum he seemed to hear.
When, kneeling low beside the bed,
The minister, to comfort, said,
"Know'st thou, old friend, the fight is won?"
Those bending near caught "Lexington."

We buried him upon the lands
For which he fought, where Concord stands;
The granite slab we sank in earth
Bore name and age and place of birth;
Else of inscription read you none
Save this, "He fought at Lexington."

TO A LITTLE TROUT

TELL me, tell me, little trout,
Does your mother know you're out, —
That you're truant from your school,
Playing hookey in this pool?

As you see, my little trout,
I desire to draw you out —
In the brook noise so abounds
That I cannot catch your sounds.

(If that joke he do but see,
Any trout should tickled be.
Would he take the point so fine,
If I dropped him just a line?)

Don't they teach it in these creeks
That when one above you speaks,
First, before a sole replies,
It is meet that you should rise?

Blithely, as becomes a trout,
(I 'm not angling for a " pout "),
Quickly take things on the fly,
For I 've other fish to fry.

Thank you, thank you, little trout,
Schools are in but *you* are out:
School and pool alike forgot —
This is hookey — is it not?

THE BEAUTIFUL BALLAD OF LADY LEE

OOTED and cloaked and gray-mustached
Through the night and the rain a soldier splashed;
At his heel as he rode a great sword clashed.

"Now, halt, I say!" came the warder's hail;
"Who rides thus late through the King's entail?
Halt! or I pierce thy shirt of mail!"

And his cross-bow, fashioned of toughest yew,
Creaked as the hempen string he drew,
And a quarrel placed and leveled true.

Clear and ready the answer came,
And a hand that might the lily shame
Held up a jewel that shone like flame.

"Who stayeth the rider that beareth the ring
To which bolts unslip and gates wide swing?
He must needs ride late who rides for the King.

"In the castle-court ye have builded high
A gallows for one who in chains doth lie:
I would see the prisoner ere he die."

"Enter, Sir Knight, in the name of the King;
Meat and wine shall the servitors bring,
And to thy black steed give sheltering."

"Nay, — since I soon again must ride, —
In the castle-court, untethered, untied,
Till his master come shall the black steed bide.

"And for meat and wine, may the saints preserve
That ever a Knight from his duty swerve —
They fast, not feast, who the King would serve."

Of the stout men-at-arms, some watch, some sleep;
Drowsy the warders who guard the keep;
And the Knight is shown to the dungeon deep.

Patiently waiting his master's commands,
But brooking no touch of varlet hands,
The black steed stood as a statue stands.

And grim stood the gallows, its sombre height
A roost for the ravens that croaked to the night,
Awaiting the prey that should come with light.

No star its silver cresset swung high
To lighten a path for the moon in the sky —
But the bell of the castle told morning was nigh.

Then the great oak door creaked again in its frame,
And forth from the portal the strange Knight came —
The jewel he bore lit the dark like flame.

But scarce neighs the steed his master to greet,
Ere the Knight has sprung to the saddle-seat, —
And is off and away like an arrow fleet!

The warder sleepily rubbing his eyes
Bethinks him the stranger has grown in size;
"Now halt!" he shouts, "or a quarrel flies!"

Small need of spur for the black steed's sides;
He feels the hand and he knows who rides;
Belike knows too that a life betides.

Quoth the warder, "To force we will then appeal;
He who cannot hear perchance may feel.
Faith, I 'll tickle his ribs with a bolt of steel!"

But no answer came to the warder's hail
Save of hoofs a clatter blown back by the gale;
And the bolt glanced aside from the shirt of mail.

On the uppermost walls now torches are shown;
There is rattle of drums, and trumpets are blown,
And doors are locked — but the horse is flown.

The dungeon they search — to find not there
A knight close bound, but a lady fair;
And her only chains were her golden hair.

To the lord of the castle when they go:
"Shall we light a fire of pitch and tow,
And burn the witch who hath cheated us so?"

"Witch or not," he said, "so true was the ring,
A higher than I must ye hither bring;
This gramary nearly concerneth the King."

When the King came riding with trappings of gold,
And hangings and banners of purple unrolled —
A king was a king in the days of old —

And they brought from the dungeon a lady fair,
Instead of the knight whom they'd prisoned there,
And hoped to have hanged in the morning air,

Right loudly he laughed in merriest glee;
And "Zooks!" (that's "Good Gracious!")
"Zooks!" cried he,
"Instead of Sir Richard ye've *Lady* Lee!

"Faith, never before from dungeon bare
Have ye haled me a traitor so passing fair
As this one whose chains seem light to wear.

"But a few days gone, it can scarce be three,
We mind," said the King (they always say *we*),
"This dame to us knelt with a wifely plea.

"Though her husband, she knew, had harried
the glen
And swept like a besom the hilltops, what then?
At heart he was one of the best of men.

"And would we once more Sir Richard release,
His raids on our outlying lands should cease;
And they both would pray for the kingdom's
peace.

"Refusing Sir Richard to pardon or spare,
We soon thereafter were made aware
That the royal jewelry needed repair.

"And the ring ye have seen we confided free
To a stripling comely enough to see,
Who said that the jeweler's son was he.

"Now the riddle is read, for the jeweler's son,
And the Knight who rode till his errand was
done,
And the witch and the Lady Lee are one.

"But though Richard sorely our patience has tried,
And yon stands the grim steed we meant he should ride,
Let our royal mercy be published wide:

"Since he must by this o'er the border be,
And beyond our reach, even let him go free;
And thou mayst rejoin him, good Lady Lee!"

(*Aside*)

And that is my story, though many, I ween,
After hanging bold Richard on Kensington Green
Would have had the King make the Widow his Queen.

But I hold that Truth in the main 's the thing,
And that much better use is made of a ring
In saving a husband than wedding a King.

IN A TIDEWAY

IN the clutch of a tide that my course compels, —
A merciless tide, that sinks and swells
To suns and moons I do not control,
And for that I cannot would wreck my soul, —
The storm-tossed toy of a turbulent tide
And only one star through the night to guide,
In a cockleshell on its crest afloat,
Still I trim the sails of my tiny boat
And strive to steer by that star remote;
For the tide that thwarts and threatens, I know,
Is itself controlled in its ebb and flow;
And what am I, a speck on the main,
Of the stars that sway the Sea to complain?
If it be in the plan that I sink at sea,
Let me sink as I sail, with pennon free;
If land I make, as a sailor should,
It is not I am great, but that One is good;
But happen what may, let the log-book tell
That I did my best with my cockleshell.

IF YOU WOULD ADDRESS

ADDRESS me not where but till light
I halt my camel for the night;
Where on the desert, sand-storm swept,
Unsheltered from the blast I slept.

Beyond, a golden city waits,
And nearer swing the distant gates,
Inside of which are rest and calm
And crystal springs and groves of palm.

As o'er the worn and dusty road
My patient camel on I goad,
We sometimes see oases green;
But wastes of desert lie between.

The well at which I kneel to drink
My parched lips mocks with bitter brink;
The tree beneath whose shade I 'd lie
Is leafless, and its boughs are dry.

Sometimes fair cities seem to rise
With minarets that pierce the skies;
I urge my camel on with blows, —
They sink in sand from which they rose.

But these white walls that now I see
Mirage and mockery cannot be;
Upon the air a music swells
That drowns the sound of camel bells.

Hunger and Thirst, what are ye now?
I see the palm-tree's laden bough;
I hear cool fountains plash inside
The gates that open swing and wide, —

Quite wide enough for me, — and too,
I think, to let my camel through;
Though still outside the gates I plod,
Address me, "Pilgrim — care of God."

DUM VIVIMUS VIGILEMUS

TURN out more ale, turn up the light;
I will not go to bed to-night.
Of all the foes that man should dread
The first and worst one is a bed.
Friends I have had, both old and young,
And ale we 've drunk, and songs we 've sung;
Enough you know when this is said:
That, one and all, they died in bed.
In bed they died, and I 'll not go
Where all my friends have perished so.
Go you who fain would buried be;
But not to-night a bed for me.

For me to-night no bed prepare,
But set me out my oaken chair;
And bid no other guests beside
The ghosts that shall around me glide:
In curling smoke wreaths I shall see
A fair and gentle company.
Though silent all, rare revelers they,
Who leave you not till break of day.

Go you who would not daylight see,
But not to-night a bed for me :
For I 've been born and I 've been wed ;
All of man's trouble comes of bed.

And I 'll not seek, whate 'er befall,
Him who unbidden comes to all,
A gruesome guest, a lean-jawed wight, —
God send he do not come to-night!
But if he do, to claim his own,
He shall not find me lying prone ;
But blithely, bravely sitting up,
And raising high the stirrup-cup.
Then, if you find a pipe unfilled,
An empty chair, the brown ale spilled, —
Well may you know, though naught be said,
That I 've been borne away to bed.

The Riverside Press
Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.

ABOUT VAGROM VERSE

68 Beacon Street,

16th May, 1889.

Dear Sir,

It is a rare pleasure & be able honestly to thank an author for his book - after reading it, but this pleasure you have given me & I thank you heartily for it. It is invidious to select favorites where there are so many more that come next, but I have been particularly touched with the pastoral poems, & so for Deacon Brown, I will only say that Dr. Holmes & I clapped hands over it together.

Faithfully yours

J. R. Lowell.

C. H. Webb, Esq.

over.

P. S. I reopen my letter again to say that you need fear no such fate for your book as befell Charles Sumner's. I long ago gave instructions to my representatives that no book presented to me by the author should ever run the risk of the bookstalls. Oddly enough it was on the Quai Voltaire that I learned the lesson.

VAGROM VERSE

BY CHARLES HENRY WEBB ("JOHN PAUL")

AUTHOR OF "WITH LEAD AND LINE," "JOHN PAUL'S BOOK," "ST. TWEL'MO," "LIFFITH LANK," etc.

One Volume. 16mo. Price $1.00.

OPINIONS OF THE POETS

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DEAR SIR, —It is a rare pleasure to be able honestly to thank an author for his book — after reading it, but this pleasure you have given me and I thank you heartily for it. It is invidious to select favorites where there are so many more that come next, but I have been particularly touched with the paternal poems, and as for Deacon Brown I will only say that Dr. Holmes and I clapped hands over it together.

Faithfully yours,
J. R. LOWELL.

These "Vagrom" lyrics are like the posies in the Groves of Blarney, in that they "spontaneous grow there," and thus charm by difference from much of the society verse. But such pieces as "Alec Dunham's Boat" and "With a Nantucket Shell" show the touch of the artist and the poet.

EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN.

330 East 17th,
Jan. 14th, 1889.

MY DEAR WEBB, — The low standard of literature in Boston may be guessed from the following paragraph out of the Transcript: —

"No book of poems has touched the people's heart for a long time like Charles Henry Webb's (John Paul) 'Vagrom Verse,' from which we copied 'Alec Dunham's Boat' the other day."

Yours ever,
W. D. HOWELLS.

423 Madison Avenue,
April 1, 1889.

My dear Mr. Webb, — I have just read through to-night the "Vagrom Verse" — every line of it. I have n't been so touched in a long time by the *heart* in any volume of verse — the genuine *heart-ring* — as I have by yours, and I cannot go to bed without saying so. You pass yourself off sometimes for a jester, but there is more than jest in "Deacon Brown" and "1860." There is a "chipping in" for decency and a tenderness for honest living in the former which makes your jest deeper in feeling than Bret Harte's best "earnest." There is a depth under the jesting, a pathos under all, which I hold to be the truest basis of the best wit.

Yours sincerely,
James Herbert Morse.

ABOUT JOHN PAUL AND HIS LITTLE SHIP VAGROM VERSE

See that lively wherry,
  Skimming down the breeze,
While her skipper smokes his pipe,
  Very much at ease?
That 's an honest sailor,
  None more true afloat:
He 's the man who sang the song
  Of "Alec Dunham's Boat."

He can tell a story,
  Debonair and gay,
Making fun of all he 's done —
  That 's his sailor way!
Hear his jolly ballads;
  Hear him crack a joke;
But be sure you don't forget
  He 's "a heart of oak."

Calls himself a vagrant, —
  Says he 's all adrift;
Yet I see him stretching out
  Friendly hands to lift
Those who have made shipwreck,
  From the troubled wave, —
Nothing makes him merrier
  Than just a chance to save.

Though he sometimes questions
If there be a star ;
Yet he tries to steer a course
Where he thinks they are.
He will see them shining,
When the clouds are past ;
Such a brave and helpful craft
Will make its port at last.

Dr. HENRY VAN DYKE.

TO CHARLES HENRY WEBB AFTER READING HIS "VAGROM VERSE"

What is *Vagrom* — how compare it ?
Prithee, how did John Paul snare it ?

Such as sliding down-balls are,
Bound the way of sun and star,
Such as gossamer weft that flies
Through October's shining skies ;
Or as motes which sunbeams hold,
Touched with argent and with gold.
Such as faces ofttimes seen,
In the woodland's hem of green,
Grimacing against the sky,
Such as firefly errantry,
Or as foam-drop from the sea,
Wherewithin a witch might be,
Who with deep Meermädchen slight
Could undo the bravest knight !

Such is *Vagrom* — I aver.
(Pardon grant me if I err.)
Here, enmeshed in verse, it lies,
Flickers, jests, appeals, or sighs,
Coy, or bold, or grave, or gay !
Yet I 'll never dare to say
How John Paul in rhyme and measure
Comprehended all this treasure !

With many and sincere thanks, I remain his debtor for the pleasure his book has given me.

EDITH M. THOMAS.

THE COLONNADE, N. Y., Apr. 10.

44 East 26th St.,
N. Y., 1 A. M. Jan. 8, '89.

MY DEAR GRATIANO, — . . . I am bound not to go to bed this n— morning, until I shall have written you my fraternal thanks for this pretty gift of your "Vagrom" wallet, and double thanks to you for your genuine, natural gift of writing songs that add to the gayety of nations and solace the jaded spirit of me, sitting alone with you in my leathern-backed chair. . . .

"Vagrom Verse" is what I thought it would be: a little book of delights — genuine, spontaneous, written by a *man*, with both fineness and strength. Various, and of various degrees, as it is, I think it charming throughout.

Your friend,
EDMUND C. STEDMAN.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

"John Paul" is an easy and versatile singer. He has tried his hand at many styles, and has done well in all. The scattered verse gathered in this little volume comprises an unusually large proportion of pieces which possess genuine claim to survival. None of them are wanting in some fitting quality of merit. . . . The humorous and domestic verses predominate, and of these the majority are marked by tender feeling underlying playful and delicate wit. Among the serious poems there are a few which show a depth and force of expression suggesting higher power than Mr. Webb, perhaps, is himself conscious of. "Alec Dunham's Boat" has a melancholy music that recurs again and again to one's memory. . . . Throughout the book there is conspicuous a fine perception of melody and rhyme and a spontaneity which broadly separates the author from the too full ranks of the machine poets. — *New York Tribune.*

"John Paul" has long been known as the writer of the cleverest burlesques in the language — "Liffith Lank" and "St. Twel'mo" — of a great number of papers, witty and wise, on all sorts of topics, and of various varieties of verse, from grave to gay, that have had great current popularity, but this is the first time that his poetry has been garnered into a sheaf, and a unique sheaf it makes. . . . No one else except Oliver Wendell Holmes himself runs so wide a gamut. There are dainty and faintly wicked *vers de société*, racy and humorous things in dialect, tender and sweet little domestic idyls, and a few things of tragic force and intensity. Here

are a number of things that have become very well known, more in fact that has and will pass into the body of the language and will last, than is to be found in the work of the large majority of our younger poets and literary men, Mr. Webb's contemporaries. . . . It is as a wit and humorist that "John Paul" is best known, and this volume alone would give him a special place in that field, even in America, where it is so crowded. There is a point to his wit and a thought beneath his humor that gives his fun an intellectual value of its own. — *Graphic.*

Something new in American poetry, even though it be light as sea-foam, is matter for gratitude. Novelty there is, of a truth, in Mr. Charles Henry Webb's "Vagrom Verse." . . . In the pretty verses to "Miss Kitten" he is like unto Mr. Ashby-Sterry, and when he addresses the "Coggia Comet" he invokes the shade of Hood. At his best, however, he suggests no parallel, as in "Deacon Brown." This whimsical production is a very pleasant satire on the universal taste for wicked heroes in fiction. . . . There is genuine humor in the demonstration of the Deacon's unfitness to stand as a hero in fiction. — *London Saturday Review.*

An old-time favorite is gladly welcomed in this late gathering of his muse's outpourings. Mr. Webb is as ever graceful, good-natured, and witty. But he can be serious, too. — *American Hebrew.*

In "Vagrom Verse" Charles Henry Webb, who is perhaps better known under his pen-name of John Paul, has gathered many bits of verse of all kinds, except the dull and didactic. Those who are familiar with John Paul's prose know that he is witty without effort, and that he has a charming way of puncturing wind-bags, flaying frauds, and slyly poking fun at the intellectual heavy-weights who imagine that the wisdom of the world is centred in them. It is probably the highest praise that one can give to his poems — in this day of over-much versemaking — to say that there is not a dull page in this book. He is bright, witty, versatile, full of quip and crank and merry wile, while occasionally he turns to serious mood and produces a short poem like "March," of which any poet might be proud. — *San Francisco Chronicle.*

The writer of so charming a work as that bit of child life in seven or eight stanzas entitled "Little Mamma" is worth reading and deserving of praise besides. — *Cleveland Leader.*

The reader may look through dozens of the recent volumes published by the younger poets and not find as much evidence of real feeling as may be traced in some poems in this book. — *Cambridge Tribune.*

Where shall one find pleasanter company than that of the "Vagrant Verses," apprehended by Mr. Johannes Paulus, and confined — daintily enough — between dark-blue covers? A roguish, irresponsible, winning set of metrical tramps they are; confessing their deficiencies off-hand with a captivating frankness. None the less their easy address claims our liking at once, and we feel no desire to abate a single tatter of their garments. Indeed, it is perhaps the most untrimmed of these merry rhymes that takes one as it were by storm; "Sloop and Cutter," for instance, that rattling record of an apocryphal happening to the yacht Hildegard. The rapidity and audacity of this performance remind one of Hood at his freshest. . . . We have dwelt too long on Mr. Webb's purely humorous verses, neglecting the tenderness that appears in the charming "Little Mamma," and the pathetic suggestiveness of "Alec Dunham's Boat." — *New York Critic.*

The writers of innocent and yet bright drollery are few, and when found should be cherished. One thinks of Barham, Hood, Douglas Jerrold, in turning over the pages of this pretty little book.— *New York Times.*

It is good verse, often very whimsical and sportive, sometimes sweet and gracious, and at other times seriously poetical in the masculine fashion of "Alec Dunham's Boat." . . . Mr. Webb wrote that capital offset to Hay's ballad of the Mississippi pilot who "held her nozzle agin' the bank till every galoot war ashore" . . . which at once knocked in the head that spasm of the heroics of rascality which set in from Bret Harte's lead. . . . Mr. Webb writes charmingly about children and domestic happiness. — *Springfield Republican.*

"Vagrom Verse" is a dainty little volume presenting a collection of poems, full of verbal music. It is held by some that to be able to laugh at nearly everything marks a very high plane of civilization; the savage being always sombre and grave. On this theory John Paul is a high product, for he deftly evokes a smile by his touch of almost anything. — *Chicago Times.*

To begin at the end, as we sometimes do with a novel, Mr. Webb says that this collection of "vagrant rhymes" might have been epic "if I 'd had a mind." So perhaps it might, but then it would n't have been half so sparkling and so pleasing as this gathering of verses "born in all sorts of weather." They present to us the lighter and more cheerful moods of the writer's nature, a nature that can be strong and deep, but chooses here to inculcate no lesson, to beat no drum. . . . The quaint humor of life that peeps out, like hepaticas among the dead leaves in early spring, and the wholesome touch that is felt all through his songs of love and home-life, are as bright and refreshing as these same spring flowers. — *Public Opinion.*

Verse and prose have slipped with equal ease from the tip of Charles Henry Webb's facile pen, and floated off into the ephemeral columns of newspapers and magazines, without an attempt being made by their author to rescue them from forgetfulness until the recent publication of "Vagrom Verse." In this dainty little volume a few of Mr. Webb's graceful poems at last are given an abiding place. We are offered half a hundred lyrics, some verging on mere burlesque, others touching the serious, but all written with a certain open-air dash and freedom, and in a broadly healthful tone, free from false sentimentality. . . . As for the *vers de société* and the humorous verses, they will make the younger poets look to their laurels. — *Chicago Tribune.*

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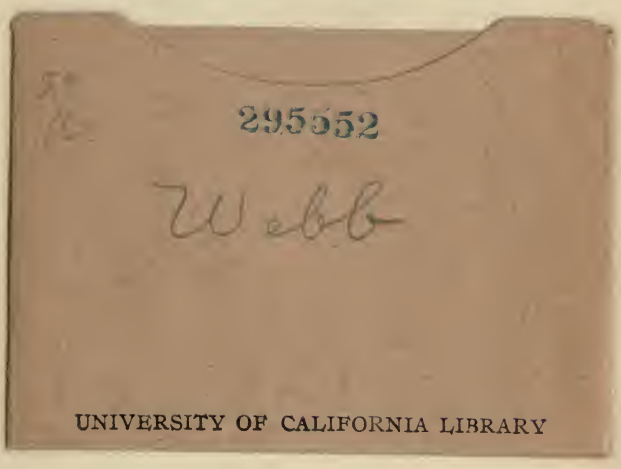
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